

THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH*

Muhammad Anisur Rahman

International Labour Office, Geneva

Consciousness of the Oppressed

Q. Do you know who is Lakshmi and who is Swaraswati?

Adivasi. Yes.

Q. Who is Lakshmi?

Adivasi. Rice, clothes, hut.

Q. And Swaraswati?

Adivasi. Sawkar's knowledge.

Q. If you could have only one of them, what is your preference?

Adivasi. Swaraswati.

Q. Why?

Adivasi. If everyone has knowledge, then no one can cheat others. Then only we can have true equality.

(A dialogue with a tribal (adivasi) poor peasant in Junglepatti, Thane district, Maharashtra, India. 'Lakshmi' and 'Swaraswati' are the Hindu goddesses of prosperity and knowledge respectively. 'Sawkar' is the money-lending landlord/trader/rich farmer.)

1. INTRODUCTION

The tradition of intellectuals stimulating and assisting popular struggles is an age-old one. This tradition seems to be gaining some momentum in recent times, and developing links not only within but also across national boundaries. Two major factors may be contributing to this: (1) convergence of national systems into elite domination over the masses, of both 'right' and 'left' varieties, which is generating its own counter-consciousness; and (2) increasing facilities for communicating between the resulting counter-culture.

This counter-culture has taken on a wide variety of characters, with some carrying a conscious research (knowledge-generation) interest. The latter variety has sometimes been referred to as 'action research', sometimes as 'participatory research'. The terminology has not yet converged.

Orlando Fals Borda favours the term 'participatory action research' - henceforth abbreviated as PAR - and I feel that this is a useful term because it emphasizes the point that we are talking about action research that is participatory and participatory research that unites with action (for transforming reality).

It cannot be claimed that PAR has as yet a convergent theoretical position. But certain concerns are being increasingly shared in common, ideological positions are being taken (not necessarily in writing) that are broadly similar, and methodological similarities in action are being observed. From this an ideological position may be inferred, and theoretical questions can be raised and discussed, all in a tentative way, as a contribution to the progressive articulation of the standpoint of PAR. This chapter is a modest attempt in this direction.

There is no space to do justice to the vast practice of PAR in this short chapter, and I have a language barrier myself in undertaking such a job. In observing some highlights from this practice, I have confined myself to a few initiatives which are:

- (a) Relatively recent, as these directly challenge us as contemporary intellectuals to respond;
- (b) Relatively well documented; and
- (c) Those of whose ideological concerns I have a better sense than others, through a combination of reading and personal dialogues with people involved in these initiatives.

These highlights from the practice of PAR are presented in section II. Section III discusses the emerging ideology of PAR and questions relating to its contribution to social transformation. The final section discusses PAR as a means of generating scientific knowledge for guidance of social practice.

II. THE PRACTICE OF PAR

Bhoomi Sena - India

A number of acutely oppressed tribal peasants in the Junglepatti belt in the Thane district of India joined the 'land-grab' movement of 1970 initiated by the left-wing parties. The movement ended in the area merely with the temporary jailing of the participants, with no resolution of the land question. Disillusioned by this 'symbolic'

character of the movement, the tribal leaders who participated in this initiated after coming out of jail an independent militant movement called 'Bhoomi Sena' (Land Army), against illegal usurpation by the money-lending '*sawkars*' of lands belonging to the tribal people. A few thousand acres of land were recovered by force (de Silva *et al.*, 1979: 2; Rahman, 1981).

There was, however, no clear thinking beyond this action to carry the movement forward, and its leadership submitted to paternalistic assistance of some social workers from outside who brought sophisticated technology and massive bank loans to help them. Economic programmes were now undertaken which were managed by the outsiders without any involvement of the people. It so happened that this non-participatory experiment ended in financial disaster due to mismanagement, and the tribal people were shocked into a consciousness against external paternalism.

At the same time late in 1975, a new phase of the Bhoomi Sena movement started in which the tribal people were committed to decide their course of action themselves. A few outsiders who had come with the earlier team of social workers but had been looking for a role in the promotion of people's self-reliance, remained with the movement and assisted it to develop a participatory, self-directed course. In particular an educationist contributed significantly to 'conscientization' of the tribal people in this new phase, by a pedagogic technique in which the tribal people got together in 'camps' where they recounted their oppressive life's experiences individually and listened to others doing so, and then discussed the commonality of these experiences in order to move towards

appreciation of the 'structure' of their environment, and from there to collective decision-making and action.

The leadership of the movement encouraged the tribal people to take local action in their own villages according to their own priorities and collective deliberations. The role of the 'centre' - a small vanguard - that now developed consisted of catalytic, supportive, co-ordinating and synthesizing tasks, for instance, learning from village-level struggles and disseminating their experiences and methods to other villages; coming to the assistance of local struggles when needed; organizing and co-ordinating mass demonstrations on specific issues; initiating investigations on the nature and causes of injustice and exploitation; and organizing periodic camps for collective analysis by the tribal people of the experiences of their struggle. The ongoing collective deliberations of the tribal people and their leadership progressively conceptualized the meaning of their struggle.

The resurgence of spontaneous action by the people resulted in confrontation again with the *sawkars* for liberation from 'bonded labour' conditions and to reclaim land illegally held by the latter, and struggles for implementation of the legal minimum wage for work done for the *sawkars*. Gradually people's organizations emerged at the village level, taking charge of village-level struggles, management of collective savings funds and various economic and social functions. Late in 1978 Bhoomi Sena initiated the formation of an agricultural workers' union in the Thane district while continuing itself as an independent movement.

In the initial stages of this new phase of the movement, the assistance of the outsiders led by the educationist was critical, in particular in the development of collective critical thinking of the tribal people. They have achieved considerable self-reliance in this regard by now, and the educationist has for all practical purposes withdrawn from the area, maintaining a loose, friendly contact with the movement.

The Change Agents Programme - Sri Lanka

The Change Agents Programme was initiated in 1978 as an Action Research Project supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) under the Ministry of Rural Development of the Sri Lankan government (Tilakaratna, 1982). It aimed at evolving a methodology for catalytic intervention in the rural sector, to stimulate self-reliant mobilization of the rural poor to overcome their poverty through the generation of internal leaders (change agents) and participatory processes. Conceptual leadership in developing the methodology was provided by a Sri Lankan social scientist assisted by an Indian action researcher, both of whom had interacted intimately with the Bhoomi Sena movement in India.

A four-member team of development workers visited a village about thirty-five miles from Colombo, in which practically all the poor families were betel producers. The team established rapport with the villagers and settled down in the village, setting out to stimulate the poor betel producers to get together, to investigate their socioeconomic situation and discuss the causes of their poverty. A process of investigation and analysis by the people themselves followed, supplemented by research by the development workers. This revealed to the betel producers that the bulk of the surplus of their labour was being appropriated by the trading middlemen who carried their products to exporting organizations. Action followed, initiated by a group of producers in January 1979 who set up an informal Betel Producers' Association. After several attempts the association succeeded in getting an export organization to buy from them directly. The resulting benefit to the producers was considerable. Producers from a number of neighboring villages started joining the association, and its membership increased to over 200 by mid-1981 from 35 in March 1979. Resistance from private traders in collusion with other export organizations was faced and gradually overcome by various strategies and tactics.

As the association grew in size, the issue of membership participation in its decision-making, vis-à-vis its office bearers, came in the forefront. Eventually the association split into five small organizations, each undertaking its own marketing work and operating as autonomous units with active participation of its members. Together, they are developing into a force to be reckoned with in the area.

Similar methods of intervention in a village in the southern coastal belt of Sri Lanka resulted in a group of coir yarn producers getting together, first to build a small capital fund by saving in kind - that is, by setting apart a few pieces of yarn as saving - out of each day's production. After building some saving the group sold the saved stock at a higher price to an outside trader bypassing the village trader, and used the proceeds to buy raw materials, also from a new source. Eventually the group found direct market outlets for their product at a very favorable price in Colombo. Other small coir producers joined, and a collective marketing organization was formed whose membership rose from 31 in March 1980 to 214 by December. By now the process has spread into neighboring villages, and similar marketing organizations have emerged in six more of them. The producers have evolved their own organizational forms - for example, in the first village the primary organizational unit is a small group of between fifteen and twenty families with ten such groups in all, linked together by a central committee consisting of representatives from each group. All members in each primary unit undertake the marketing and handling work on a rotating basis with no hierarchy of officials. All primary groups hold meetings every week, and the ten groups meet in a general session once a month.

The village organizations have federated into an inter-village organization of coir producers to promote their common cause, through activities such as joint negotiation with export organizations, negotiation with the government for various facilities, and expansion of the movement into new villages.

Neither the betel producers' nor the coir producers' organizations are now dependent on the initial teams of development workers ('animators') who stimulated their self-reliant development. These development workers left the respective villages by June 1981 and have since been initiating similar processes in other areas, occasionally visiting the earlier villages where they started their work.

As a whole the Change Agents Programme is developing into a small-scale movement. It is now working also with other small rural producers such as tea and rubber smallholders, milk producers, rural artisans and fishermen. Besides

the Ministry of Rural Development in the government, the programme is now being carried forward also by a newly formed non-government organization (NGO) - Participatory Institute for Development Alternatives (PIDA) - set up by a group of persons who were involved with the original UNDP-sponsored project. PIDA is being co-ordinated by a senior university professor after the untimely death of the programme's first intellectual leader (GVS de Silva).

Proshika - Bangladesh

'Proshika' was established in 1976 by a team of educated young activists, as a non-government development agency (Hossain, 1982). The word 'Proshika' is an acronym signifying development education, training and action, three essential elements integral to Proshika's approach to rural development. It is funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) through the Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO). The primary aim of Proshika is to help the rural underprivileged achieve self-awareness, see their own problems and find their own ways of solving them. There are seven main steps in Proshika's approach: (1) individuals and groups are identified from among the villagers who have expressed interest or shown initiative in sustained development activities; (2) these people are then invited to visit an existing Proshika development centre; (3) Proshika then encourages them to receive training in leadership and organizational skills, with emphasis on analysis by the underprivileged themselves of the society, by drawing examples from their own life's situations; (4) after such initial training, Proshika encourages them to organize a group composed of members with homogeneous characteristics - for example, landless or marginal farmers, fishermen, etc. A Proshika 'animator' works as a guide in the group-formation process; (5) the group is urged from the outset to build a joint saving fund irrespective of what the initial contributions may be. It is asked also to meet regularly to discuss the problems of its members and to identify common action to solve them according to their own priorities. Emphasis is laid on the undertaking of co-operative income-generating projects; (6) after a group has identified a project, Proshika provides the specific skills-training required by the group; (7) when the group is ready and able to take on an income-generating project with its own funds, Proshika makes available a small loan, if required, on a matching grant basis.

Proshika has established two regional centers and sixteen development centers in eight districts. Each of these centers offers training facilities to Proshika's field workers and members of Proshika groups, besides serving as places for review of experiences and exchanges between the trainers and group members. These development centres by now cover more than 4,000 Proshika groups with an average size of between fifteen and twenty families in each group.

While emphasizing group action for income generation, Proshika gives considerable importance to organization building, group solidarity and collective action for realization of the basic economic and social rights of the underprivileged. In different places several Proshika groups are meeting together to discuss acts of social injustice and oppression by the rural elites, and are taking coordinated action to resist them, often with significant success. In some places Proshika groups have federated into intergroup organizations. Through Proshika's intervention the underprivileged in the Proshika areas are emerging as a strong countervailing force at the local level.

Cross-fertilization

The schemes mentioned above are some of the more widely known attempts by educated activists to generate participatory grass-roots processes for improvement of the economic and social status of the underprivileged in South Asia. But there are many more, and the number is growing (Tandon, 1980). A process of cross-fertilization between them is ongoing, both at the national and international levels. Workshops bringing together several NGOs and voluntary groups engaged in such work is commonplace in India and Bangladesh. One NGO in India - the People's Institute for Development and Training (PIDT, New Delhi), itself engaged in PAR with the rural underprivileged in several parts of India - has initiated with the sponsorship of the International Labour Organization (ILO) a process of People's Research on Forestry, Ecology and the Oppressed, in which ten forest-based poor people's movements (including Bhoomi Sena) in different parts of India are getting together over a series of grass-roots workshops and are conducting joint fact-finding investigations, with the assistance of

sympathetic professionals to develop and articulate their joint position on the question of forestry management.

At an inter-country level, Proshika, PIDT and the Change Agents Programme have been interacting closely: the development workers in the Change Agents Programme visited the other two initiatives before starting their own work in Sri Lanka, and more recently these three have interacted systematically at the leadership level for cross-fertilization in an ILO-sponsored exchange project. The latter also involved an initiative of the Rural Workers' Office of the Ministry of Labour in the Government of the Philippines - Group Action Among Landless and Near-landless Workers in the Sugar Crop Dominated Regions - which was initially rather paternalistic in its approach, oriented primarily towards the mobilization of external resources to generate employment and incomes for the underprivileged; as a result of interaction with Proshika, PIDT and the Change Agents Programme, it is now working under the name of 'Sarilakas' (own strength), to stimulate grass-roots self-reliance, seeking to generate processes of people's own deliberation and action according to their own priorities. A number of village-level rural workers' organizations have emerged as a result, with their self-deliberated efforts directed primarily at resisting injustice and exploitation by local and external vested interests. Needless to say, in the Philippines itself there are several other such initiatives.

Methodology

Naturally while such works have many differences in their approaches, broad similarities can be observed in many of them. For those that are in close touch with one another, a methodological and, indeed, ideological convergence seems to be approaching. Methodologically converging trends in the following directions may be observed:

- 1 . Catalytic initiatives are taken by persons coming from the well educated class (university graduates and above), independent of macro social organizations such as political parties, to promote self-mobilization of the rural underprivileged for group or organized action to emerge from out of their own deliberations.

2. The starting point in generating such grass-roots processes is the stimulation of the underprivileged to get together to inquire why they are poor and oppressed through social investigation and analysis of their own, which promote their critical self-awareness of their environment.
3. The underprivileged are encouraged to discuss what they could do by uniting to overcome poverty and oppression. They are encouraged to form groups or organizations absolutely of their own, whose structure and functioning are to be decided by them, and through these to take economic and social action according to their self-deliberated priorities.
4. An attempt is made to generate a self-reliance consciousness among the underprivileged, and an attitude of assertion of their knowledge, views and decisions vis-à-vis outsiders. Materially, external resources and expertise are not considered to be primary in solving their problems - these are offered only as supplements when needed and available to the mobilization of the people's own resources and skills. In the use of external resources emphasis is placed on the further development of people's own resources and skills for them to achieve progressively greater self-reliance.
5. The people are encouraged to meet periodically in camps or 'people's workshops' in order to review their experiences, to undertake periodic fact-finding investigations of their environment, and to take decisions for subsequent action based on their own research thus conducted. They seek thereby to generate a process of 'people's praxis', that is, a progressive rhythm of action and reflection.
6. The people, once they have developed experience in mobilizing and in organized action, are encouraged to stimulate and assist other underprivileged people to start similar action, and to gradually form higher level organizations by federating smaller ones and to develop links with other organizations of this type.
7. Dependence of the people on the initial catalysts is supposed to cease, through the generation and development of internal leadership, cadres and skills. This does not necessarily mean actual physical withdrawal of the catalysts from people's processes; but the people should within a reasonable time be able to carry on with their collective activities on their

own, while a catalyst may continue his or her association with such processes and seek new roles in their progressive development.

8. The initiators of such action have not only a practical, but also a research interest, in generating and assisting such self-reliant people's processes. This includes a search for a methodology sensitive to self-reliant catalytic action, for a role for intellectuals in the development of people's praxis and 'people's power', and inquiry into the implications of such interaction for social transformation. This research, however, is subordinate to the people's collective interests as perceived by them, and to a commitment to protect information whose dissemination might be contrary to this interest.

The Freirian Work

There are such activities in other parts of the world as well (Callaway, 1980; Mustafa, 1981) which can, however, be competently discussed only by colleagues more familiar with them. Mention may be made of the work of Paulo Freire, a legend in PAR, which has stimulated a world-wide movement in the pedagogy of literacy, besides influencing action research not directly focused on literacy as such. Indeed most of the Asian initiatives referred to above have used the concept of 'conscientization' in the same sense as Freire - that is, stimulation of the self-reflective critical awareness of the oppressed people of their social reality and of their ability to transform it by conscious action. The rejection of 'aid' and 'extension' as solutions to the problem of people's development ('liberation'), which is implicit in the Asian initiatives, has also found its sharpest expression in Freirian work and thinking.

However, the pedagogy of literacy as a method of conscientization has not featured very much in the particular Asian cases observed; instead the thrust has been the stimulation of immediate social investigation and analysis by the oppressed people - social research - collectively.

Work in Colombia

Among other PAR activities outside Asia, one of the most illuminating reviews has been done by Fals Borda (1979) of the work that he and his colleagues did with grass-roots groups in Colombia. A major focus of this work has been the legitimization of popular knowledge and its development into 'scientific knowledge', with the aim of assisting in the development of a 'science of the proletariat' with which the masses could conduct their own struggle for social transformation. Fals Borda's self-critique of this work brings home the paramount care that is needed in the methodology of such effort. With his characteristic sensitivity and frankness, Fals Borda reports that the search for a way to achieve the intended objective has so far been inconclusive. While the intellectuals conducting this search were able to develop considerable rapport with the masses, the latter were not stimulated to take over the initiative in the intellectual inquiry. In the end, "with characteristic impatience, it was the action researchers and their intellectual allies who were forced to define 'popular science' . . . , and inject their own definition of it into the context of reality. The result was a special application of the notion of insertion into the social process in order to 'place knowledge at the service of popular interests', but such knowledge did not derive from the objective conditions of the proletariat as would have been theoretically more correct As historical materialism was almost an exclusive heritage of action researchers and committed intellectuals, they consequently had to diffuse it among the grass roots as an ideology. This led to the adoption as 'special mediating categories' of what in a classic manner, are expounded upon as general Marxist postulates. In this manner, what was termed 'popular science' had to be an ideological replica of certain general theses of historical materialism as developed in other contexts and social formations. This is to say that the groups fell victim to the worst historical form of dogmatism, that of 'mimesis"'. (Fals Borda, 1979: 49)

Here Fals Borda touches on the source of elite domination over the masses in many radical attempts at social transformation, and PAR continues in its search for ways of avoiding this tragic pitfall.

III. PAR AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

The Ideology

Whatever the successes, or failures, underlying all such work is the idea that a self-conscious people, those who are currently poor and oppressed, will progressively transform their environment by their own praxis. In this process others may play a catalytic and supportive role, but will not dominate.

Many participatory action researchers claim to have been inspired by the ideals of historical materialism. Indeed the notion of 'class struggle' as opposed to class harmony is implicit in PAR's approach which selects the poor and oppressed for self-conscious mobilization to assert themselves; the resulting actions of the oppressed are inevitably constituting class struggles of different forms, testifying to the inherent class consciousness of the oppressed.

Historical materialism, however, has passed through many hands, in theory as well as in application, and there seems no longer to be any broad consensus as to its operational meaning. The recent growth of PAR as an activity independent from left-wing political parties suggests that it is opposed at least to a certain interpretation of this ideology that views social transformation as primarily the task of a 'vanguard' party which will assume (itself) to have a consciousness that is 'advanced' relative to the consciousness of the oppressed masses, and who will mobilize the masses for social revolution and social reconstruction. One feels from interaction with PAR activists that, in fact, the growth of PAR owes itself to the crisis of the left as well as to the crisis of the right: application of the 'vanguard' party theory has produced structural change in a number of situations, but there is evidence that in several of them newer forms of domination over the masses have emerged, and to this the vanguards have not shown much sensitivity. People's liberation in many revolutionary' societies has as a result remained elusive. The ultimate caricature of the revolutionary ideal of liberation

is visible today (January 1981) in Poland where the self-generated countervailing power of the working class vis-à-vis the vanguard is being militarily suppressed in the name of protecting 'socialism', which seemed to be a strategy of development based on paternalistic deliveries to the people through expertise and with massive borrowed finance. This strategy, which was managed without involving the people, has failed even in its own terms and has led the country into economic and financial bankruptcy - a case of Bhoomi Sena, in its first phase, on a national scale.

Dual Transformation

Historical experience of this nature calls for rethinking of the meaning of 'liberation'. Surely liberation must be opposed to all forms of elite domination over the masses. The dominant view of social transformation has been preoccupied with the need for changing existing, oppressive structures of relations in material production. This is certainly a necessary task. But - and this is the distinctive viewpoint of PAR - domination of masses by elites is rooted not only in the polarization of control over the means of material production but also over the means of knowledge production including, as in the former case, the social power to determine what is valid or useful knowledge. Irrespective of which of these two polarizations sets off a process of domination, it can be argued that one reinforces the other in augmenting and perpetuating this process. By now in most polarized societies the gap between those who have social power over the process of knowledge generation - an important form of 'capital' inasmuch as knowledge is a form of social power - and those who have not, has reached dimensions no less formidable than the gap in access to the means of physical production. History is showing that a convergence of the latter gap in no way ensures convergence of the former; on the contrary, existence of the latter has been seen to offset the advantages of revolutionary closures of the former and has set off processes of domination once again.

In order to improve the possibility of liberation, therefore, these two gaps should be attacked, wherever feasible, simultaneously. This is not accomplished by the masses merely being mobilized by a vanguard body with the latter's 'advanced' consciousness. People cannot be liberated by a consciousness and knowledge

other than their own, and a strategy such as the above inevitably contains seeds of new forms of domination. It is absolutely essential, therefore, that the people develop their own endogenous process of consciousness raising and knowledge generation, and that this process acquires the social power to assert itself vis-à-vis all elite consciousness and knowledge. The theoretical basis for this assertion is discussed in the final section of this chapter.

The change in the relations of knowledge that is being conceived goes beyond the concept of 'from the masses, to the masses' (Mao Zedong, 1968). The Chinese revolution did seek to legitimize people's knowledge and thought, and asked elites to go to the masses and learn from them. But the task of systematizing people's thought was given, it seems, to the elites (intellectuals) and not to the masses, with the presumption that the people are incapable of systematizing their own thought - that is, of building their own science. In this view revolutionary theory rests ultimately with the elites. Whether Mao Zedong's thought correctly reflected the people's thought or not, the process of its systematization was apparently external to the process of the people's own collective reflection, and the knowledge that was built was in the end handed down to the people. The wisdom of all great religions can be traced to the wisdom of ordinary people revealed at a certain point in some particular context; but systematized religion descending from above and preached as a faith, rather than (scientifically) rationalized through processes of people's own (collective) self-reflection (see section II), is alienating rather than liberating. It can also be replaced by another religion if the faith does not work or if the 'prophet' dies.

PAR and macro social structure

PAR is a search for ways of promoting the dual transformation process conceived above by generating and assisting processes of people's own praxis. It starts at the grass roots as a micro level activity, and seeks to stimulate and assist grass-roots processes to develop into a wider movement. How far this can go from any given situation cannot be usefully speculated about in the abstract. PAR, and the development of people's praxis which it seeks to promote, are creative acts that must move with skill and tact in order to create and expand space for their own continued growth. In this sense there is no theory of how

PAR may, if at all, bring about macro structural change by itself or through the processes that it generates. In fact the notion of praxis is opposed to theorizing that asks and presumes to answer questions on the course of progressive creative encounters between social forces.

In places where sustained PAR is possible, there is evidence of the generation of social transformation processes at the local level, in terms of both of the two relations mentioned above. This shows that objective conditions are favorable for the development of such processes in these places, at least up to a point. For the Asian experiences in particular it appears that a sporting chance exists for the oppressed to be able to unite and for their collective power to wrest significant gains at least from their immediate exploiters.

Specific explanation for the existence of such space in any given country should be derived from the specific socio-political context, and this will not be attempted in this paper. Broadly speaking, one would surmise that the strength of the link between the status quo of macro power and the local elites will be a factor in explaining this phenomenon. The stronger this link is, the likelier it is for macro forces to come to the protection of local vested interests in the event of any threat to the latter from organized action by the oppressed, thereby making it difficult for local action by itself to achieve much. On the face of it, this link is a question of the dynamics of political alliance between national and local elites, a relation that by itself may vary both over time and space, permitting independent grass-roots mobilization, more in certain times and areas than in others. There may be some role in a more basic sense of the economic worth of local elites to the national elites, by way of the dependence of the privileges of the latter on the appropriation of economic surplus by the former at the local level.

For Bhoomi Sena this conjecture is corroborated by a participatory study of the movement that observes the money lending sawkars to be an unproductive class that has been contributing little to developing the productive forces of Junglepatti in order to be able to make any significant surplus available for use at 'higher' levels (De Silva *et al.*, 1979). Indeed one of the reasons Bhoomi Sena has come as far as it has may be ascribed to the contradiction between the feudal money-lending class against which the tribal people's struggle is chiefly aimed,

and the emerging class of capitalist farmers in the areas, with power at the state level no longer committed to bail out the former parasitic class. In Sri Lanka attempts (now being withdrawn) to create a welfare state rather than develop the productive forces resulted in the creation of a soft society as a whole, where the 'traditional' sector has been subsidized with resources raised through taxation of the 'modern' sector supplemented by foreign aid (Haque *et al*, 1977). And in Bangladesh the rulers in recent times have given the impression of being quite content with the image of an 'international basket case', with success of government policy often equated with the amount of foreign aid it is able to obtain, domestic resource mobilization remaining at an acutely low level (Alamgir, 1976). In such situations the economic worth of local-level elites to the national elites is low and in places negative, so that popular movements confronting the former alone may not be viewed by the latter as an immediate threat to its material interests. Within limits the national elites may actually be induced to patronize such movements as examples of democratic tolerance and concern for the well-being and rights of the poor, a gesture that may be stimulated also by the support to such movements of foreign donor agencies, for obvious reasons. It is, however, also not improbable that sections within the national elites may cherish some nationalistic sentiments and may be attracted by initiatives in search of an alternative development strategy in the direction of greater national self-reliance, and the support of such quarters may actually have played a role in the development of grass-roots people's movements in the Asian region.

Notwithstanding objective conditions such as the above favoring the growth of PAR in some countries, there may be limits to this growth in any one of them, given ultimately by the macrostructure of the society that progressive development of grass-roots processes and their interlinking may eventually confront. In other societies with different objective conditions very little activity of this nature may be possible. If such a limit is reached, it would be necessary to seek to change the macrostructure by appropriate means in order to enable the further development of the people's praxis. Unless people's self-conscious mobilization itself has developed already to a point at which they are able to take on this task, PAR has the responsibility to ally with other progressive social forces for confronting the macrostructure at appropriate times.

PAR in the 'Womb of the Old Order'

It is important, however, to note that the development of genuine people's praxis after macrostructural change is likely to be limited by the kind of social processes that have preceded it. The classic work of Bettelheim (1976) on the Soviet revolution reveals, sector by sector, the almost total unprepared-ness of the Soviet working class to self-manage the task of post-revolutionary reconstruction, so that 'experts' were able to take over and consolidate their power and eventually establish a dictatorship over the people. All revolutions witness this struggle for power after the old order is overthrown, between forces committed to the release of people's initiatives and those seeking to dominate the people in new ways. It may be suggested that a crucial factor by which this struggle may be won or lost is the relations of knowledge - more specifically whether the people can assert their right to apply their own knowledge in reconstructing society, and their autonomy of choice of outside knowledge rather than submitting to external expertise in a state of helplessness.

The earlier people's praxis starts, the greater should be the consciousness and confidence of the people at any stage to resist an invasion of expertise. Accordingly the liberation potential of the destruction of an old order should be greater the more advanced is people's praxis at the time of this act of revolution. It is therefore never too early to start PAR, if space for this exists or can be created. Under such conditions vanguard praxis cannot be viewed as a substitute for people's praxis, if liberation indeed is the objective. The growth of PAR, and for that matter popular movements, in several countries in recent times demonstrates that people's praxis is possible, right now. This is a challenge to all vanguards to clarify their commitment. The possibility exists, unfortunately, that the further development of PAR, which even reactionary social structures may permit, may be pre-empted by the action of other macro social forces committed to some kind of structural change but indifferent to the development of self-assertive people's initiatives.

Notwithstanding many obstacles that are being and will be encountered, there is some assurance that the ongoing PAR in different countries may not be in vain.

There is evidence already of the impact of the Freirian work on revolutionary thinking, and if it has not by itself yet made a 'revolution' in any single country, revolutionary leaderships after coming into power are seeking to adapt the Freirian method in educational programmes for reconstructing society (e.g. in Cuba, Nicaragua, Guinea Bissau). Thus even micro level experiments within restricted space can develop liberation-promoting knowledge and methods that may find macro-level application after space for this has been created by revolutionary action. The same may be said of the micro-level initiatives that are going on in Asia. Any national leadership in these countries which seeks ways of social reconstruction that will avoid an inglorious and often hopeless strategy of delivery of development from above and outside, will do well to consider the methodology of generating self-reliant people's processes that some of these initiatives are developing.

PAR's Own Tension

'At times this congress sounds like an intellectuals' meeting. If they want to hold a congress then let the intellectuals hold one without us.' - Jan Jedreze Jewski, a worker from Gdansk, at Solidarity's Congress on 29 September 1981
(*Financial Times*, 1081).

But PAR itself needs to be modest about its own role. It should be admitted that it constitutes a rather unusual interaction between two social classes: in terms of material production, intellectuals are primarily a consumer class vis-à-vis the class of direct producers, and in terms of knowledge production it is, traditionally, the opposite. It is significant to observe that PAR postulates eliminating the second class distinction but not the first, insofar as intellectuals are not supposed to engage in manual labour (Fals Borda, 1981a). Thus PAR postulates perpetuation of one of the 'great contradictions' in society. This must imply deep tensions in terms of the distribution of material privileges and social power from which PAR cannot be claimed to be immune.

PAR, after all, is threatening to become a respectable intellectual movement, and participatory researchers are gaining in social status, within and across national frontiers. PAR is getting institutionalized, and this will corrupt some in the

movement at the same time as it will promote its growth. Finally, PAR constitutes praxis of the participatory researcher as well as that of the people, and the two processes are different, rooted in the respective traditions and accumulated wisdoms of the two parties in this interaction. The consequent pairs of knowledge-building and self-transformative processes may not always be in harmony, aggravating the tension that is inherent in this interaction.

As one participatory action researcher - Edel Guiza, a 'community facilitator' in the Sarilakas project in the Philippines - wrote to me recently: *'in this work you have to constantly fight your enemies, and the greatest enemy is yourself'*.

IV. PAR AS RESEARCH

PAR is often viewed as a kind of research, and a discussion of this aspect of its activity is in order here. As Paul Oquist (1977) has observed, the epistemological premises of action research conform to those of pragmatism and dialectical materialism as schools of scientific research. These schools hold that science should be purposive, aimed at the modification of reality, and should unite with efforts to do so. This also means that research should be value- or ideology-directed, a standpoint that is explicit in research of these two schools. The specific ideology of PAR that is elaborated in this chapter separates it from pragmatism which keeps the choice of ideology as an open question; the ideology of PAR may be considered, if one wishes, to be one of the several interpretations of dialectical (historical) materialism, but this is an immaterial question of labelling.

Value-Bias

The epistemological standpoint of PAR opposes that of other schools such as empiricism, logical positivism and structuralism, which reject social value-bias in what is considered to be 'scientific' research, and from the same principle adopt the detached observational method of social inquiry. It may be argued, however, that no research in the final analysis can be value-free, although some specific inquiries may not be consciously value-biased.

In the first place, although research may be considered by some schools to be valid for its own sake irrespective of its social use, the 'social value added' by research - that is, the social effects of the application of the knowledge produced by those who are in a position to apply it - is an observable fact that cannot be dismissed. Given the structure of society, the products of specific research activities will be used more by some social classes than by others, naturally to the greater intended benefit of the former. It is in general possible by relatively elementary social analysis (which even the 'illiterate', oppressed poor are capable of doing) to discover which social class will be in a position to use a particular knowledge in efforts to promote its own interests. In this sense all research whose results may be applied in practice has class bias, and this ideological responsibility of research cannot be avoided.

In the second place, there can be a more subtle value-bias implicit in the choice of the logical system of analysis in social research. Consider, for example, the system of formal logic vis-à-vis dialectical logic. The former postulates that something that is observed to be 'A' cannot be 'not-A' at the same time, thereby ruling out the possibility of a change from 'A' to 'not-A' in certain ways that are considered to be possible by the latter. Policy conclusions from research of the same phenomenon by the two logical systems may therefore differ, with possible ideological implications that may be important. Thus, for example, if the poor are observed to be incapable of doing social analysis, formal logic would tend to conclude that they should therefore receive education to do so; but dialectical logic, postulating that the observed incapability unites with its opposite into which it may transform itself in response to appropriate stimulation, might suggest a different kind of pedagogy (the kind discussed in section 11) to provide this stimulation - an act of liberating the thought process - to the people rather than for outsiders to educate the poor. The profound ideological difference between the two conclusions should be obvious.

In the third place, ideological bias is direct in the detached observational method of social research that implies a 'subject-object' relationship between the researcher and the researched (the people) in contrast to the 'subject-subject' relationship of participatory action research. Research on oppressed people by external researchers with a subject-object relationship assumes and asserts the

myth of the incapability of the people to participate in the research as equals. This humiliates the people, and alienates them from their own power of generating knowledge relevant for transforming their environment by their own initiative. This makes them wait for elite researchers to come and find out about them, to write about them and make policy recommendations for outsiders to solve their problems. This helps to perpetuate the domination of the people for which as we have observed not only their economic dependence, but also their intellectual dependence on privileged elites, are responsible. In this way this research methodology has contributed to inaction of the people and has invited action by others, and has had therefore profound practical as well as ideological consequences. Needless to say, 'radical' research by the non-participatory method, including 'vanguard' praxis that has not involved the people, is also responsible in this matter.

Finally, the methodological premise that knowledge must be produced by detached observation has also contributed to the creation and perpetuation of a class of intellectuals (experts, technocrats) distinct from the masses of direct producers, constituting a separation of mental from manual labour. This class has been seen to be politically active in controlling or influencing social power to promote its own privileges in both pre- and post-'revolutionary' situations. In this sense non-involvement is a myth - the social researcher is involved consciously or unconsciously in his or her own bid for social power, and the observational method of research serves as an instrument to promote this interest.

Objectivity

One may question also a claim to objectivity in research if this were to mean being free from subjective bias. The methodological biases discussed above are subjective biases. Such bias is inherent also in conceptualizing and categorizing most human phenomena, and full communicability of such concepts and categories requires a sharing of sensuous, subjective perceptions - that is, communication at a subjective level in addition to formal definitions if these are so defined.

There is, however, another sense in which research may be defined to be objective (or, for that matter, 'scientific'), that is, in the sense of the methodology and product having passed through a process of social verification. This produces social knowledge that is distinct from knowledge that is purely individual and subjective. Objectivity in this sense requires transition from the individual to a collective. This in turn requires that (a) a collective is defined; (b) codes of communication (language) exist or are developed within the collective; and (c) agreement be reached within the collective as to valid methods of investigation, reasoning and refutation of observations and arguments.

Research in all well-established schools has a verification system of this nature, explicitly or implicitly, and is objective if verified within its own paradigm. In the more advanced schools the method of verification has by now become more or less standardized, and verification is often possible by mechanical application of certain rules or arguments so that interpersonal communication may not be necessary for establishing its objectivity. It is important to recognize, however, that objectivity in this sense is relative and internal to the collective concerned (e.g. a research profession). For those not belonging to this collective, either because of a lack of communicability or because they do not accept its premises or rules, this knowledge either has no meaning or is not acceptable. There is in this sense no universality in any 'science' insofar as the entire human race does not constitute a collective for the purpose of scientific knowledge generation. If the Chinese have not followed the verification system of some western schools in developing their knowledge, this does not make acupuncture, for example, a piece of 'unscientific' knowledge in the endogenous development of the Chinese medical science.

PAR, an emerging school of research, also generates objective, scientific knowledge in this sense. Moser (1977, 1981) has discussed the verification process in people's collectives. This is in general the dialogical process of collective reflection when people 'withdraw' from action for review and decision-making during their rhythm of action and reflection (Fals Borda, 1981a). It is argumentative and dependent on consensus rather than on pre-established rules to be applied mechanically. This does not make this process any less objective or scientific than other types of research as long as the necessary

criteria for objectivity are satisfied. The people are entitled to see their 'ghosts' as professional researchers see theirs (Cain, 1977), and regard them as part of their objective reality - as a scientific truth in their endogenous knowledge-building process - so long as their existence can be collectively verified, tentatively at a point of time, and is open to subsequent refutation.

An immediate objective of PAR is to return to the people the legitimacy of the knowledge they are capable of producing through their own collectives and verification systems, which they may decide to establish themselves as fully scientific, and their right to use this knowledge - not excluding any other knowledge but not dictated by it - as guide in their own action. The reappropriation of this right by the people and its assertion is considered by PAR to be fundamental in the promotion of its ideology of dual social transformation, for the elimination of a major source of dependence that is standing in the way of people's liberation in both pre- and post-'revolutionary' societies.

Two Research Streams

PAR also involves a knowledge-generation process for the participatory researchers, a scientific process in its own right. However, participatory researchers being in general intellectuals coming from a tradition very different from the underprivileged masses with whom they work, communication between the two may not be good enough for the two research processes to converge into a single stream of knowledge building. PAR, therefore, may involve two different knowledge-generation streams, and this has implications for social relations between the people and participatory researchers to which reference has been made in the previous section.

V. SUMMARY

By participatory action research (PAR) we are talking about action research that is participatory, and participatory research that unites with action.

Short glimpses are given of PAR with the Bhoomi Sena movement in India, the Change Agents Programme in Sri Lanka and the work of Proshika in Bangladesh.

Cross-fertilization between such activities within and across national boundaries is mentioned. A converging trend in the methodology of such work is observed in the direction of the catalytic work of educated activists who generate and promote the self-organization of the rural poor and processes of their own praxis. This organization becomes progressively independent of outside assistance.

Mention is made of the Freirian concept of 'conscientization' that is reflected in the Asian initiatives, which have, however, used literacy less as a method of conscientization and have stimulated immediate social investigation and analysis by the oppressed people. Finally the work in Colombia is cited, which sought to generate an endogenous 'science of the proletariat' but ended up with the reformulation by radical intellectuals of revolutionary dogmas developed in other contexts.

The ideological trend in PAR is elaborated in terms of the view that a self-conscious people will transform their environment by their own praxis, as opposed to a social revolution attempted by a vanguard party with 'advanced' consciousness gained primarily through vanguard praxis; the latter may produce structural change but has the seeds of newer forms of domination. It is suggested that liberation opposes domination of all forms, and requires the dual transformation of relations of production in both physical goods and knowledge, to be attempted simultaneously. PAR is a search for ways of promoting this.

It is observed that PAR starts as a micro-level activity and confronts vested interests at the local level. Its growth may be facilitated by a weak link between national elites and local elites, probably depending in part upon the economic worth of the latter in preserving the former's privileges. Eventually macro constraints have to be encountered, to be overcome by macro action. The dialectical relation between PAR and macrostructural change is discussed, observing in particular the role of PAR before structural change in advancing the possibility of liberation activity after such change.

It is noted that PAR has its own tensions; arising out of the differences in the two traditions involved in this interaction - the intellectual and the popular. It constitutes praxis of both the parties, and the two may not necessarily converge.

As a method of research, PAR and people's praxis are frankly social-value biased. It is argued that the ideological burden of the mainstream of research is heavy - the application of all research is class-biased and the bias may be anticipated so that responsibility for this cannot be avoided. It is also argued that the methodology of all social enquiries has ideological implications, which are discussed. This, it is observed, nevertheless permits research to be 'objective' in the sense of passing through a process of social verification. PAR and people's praxis are in this sense a valid, objective research method. An immediate objective of PAR is to return to the people as part of the dual transformation process the scientific legitimacy of the knowledge they are capable of producing by creating their own system of social verification.

NOTES

*Paper presented at the plenary session on 'contradictions, conflicts and strategies of societal change', of the Tenth World congress of sociology held in Mexico in August 1982. It was first published as *The Theory and Practice of Participatory Research* (WEP IO/WP. 29), 1983, International Labour Office, Geneva. Republished in Orlando Fals Borda (ed.) *The Challenge of Social Change*, Sage Studies in International Sociology, vol 32, London, 1985, and 1988. Shadish, William R Jr and Reichart, Charles S. (eds.) 1987. *Evaluation Studies Review Annual*, Vol. 12, London, Sage Publication.

1. This follows Heisenberg's principle that every act of observation changes the reality that is observed (Paranjape et al., 1981).

2. The relativity of scientific observation has long been established by Einstein's theory of relativity. Social life is a conglomeration of matter in motion, and it is a pity that notwithstanding the theory of relativity, the mainstream of social science has remained in the Newtonian age with its postulate of an absolute truth which scientists can discover from outside (Paranjape et al., 1981).

REFERENCES

Alamgir, Mohiuddin (1976) 'Economy of Bangladesh: Which Way are we Moving?' Background paper to the Presidential Address delivered at the Second Annual Conference of the Bangladesh Economic Association, Dhaka University, Dhaka, Bangladesh 14-17 March (mimeographed).

Bettelheim, Charles (1976) *Class Struggles in the USSR, First Period: 1917-1923*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Cain, Bonnie J. (1977) *Participatory Research: Research with Historic Consciousness*. Toronto: International Council for Adult Education.

Callaway, Helen (ed.) (1980) *Participation in Research, Case Studies of Participatory Research in Adult Education*. Amersfoort: Netherlands Centre for Research and Development in Adult Education.

De Silva, G.V.S., N. Mehta, A. Rahman and P. Wignaraja (1979) 'Bhoomi Sena: A Struggle for People's Power', *Development Dialogue*, 2: 3-70.

Fals Borda, Orlando (1979) 'Investigating Reality in Order to transform it', *Dialectical Anthropology*, 4 (1): 33-56.

Fals Borda, Orlando (1981a) 'The Challenge of Action Research', *Development: Seeds of Change, Village through Global Order*, 1: 55-61.

Fals Borda, Orlando (1981b) 'Science and the Common People', *Journal of Social Studies*, 11.

Fals Borda, Orlando (1981c) 'Die Bedeutung der Sozialwissenschaft und die praktische Produktion von Wissen in der Dritten Welt: Die Herausforderung der Aktionsforschung', *Osterreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft*, 2.

Financial Times, London, 30 September 1981.

Haque, Wahidul, N. Mehta, A. Rahman and P. Wignaraja (1977) 'Towards a Theory of Rural Development', *Development Dialogue*, 2: 9-137.

Hossain, Mosharraf (1982) *Conscientising Rural Disadvantaged Peasants in Bangladesh: Intervention through Group Action, A Case Study of Proshika*. World Employment Programme Research Working Paper No. WEP IO/WP.27, International Labour Office, Geneva.

Mao Zedong (1968) 'Several Questions on the Method of Direction', *Selected Works 3*. Peking: Government Printing House.

Moser, Heinz (1977) 'Action Research as a New Research Paradigm in the Social Sciences,' Paper presented at the International Sociological Association Symposium on Action Research and Scientific Analysis, Cartagena, Colombia, April.

Moser, Heinz (1981) 'Participatory Action Research: The Aspect of Research.' Paper presented at the International Seminar on Participatory Research and Training in Local Development, Lepolampi, Finland 9- 11 September.

Mustafa, Kemal (1981) 'Participatory Research Amongst Pastoralist Peasants in Tanzania: The Experience of the Jipemoyo Project in Bagarnoyo District.' Mimeographed World Employment Programme Research Report, International Labour Office, Geneva.

Oquist, Paul (1977) 'The Epistemology of Action Research.' Paper presented at the International Sociological Association Symposium on Action Research and Scientific Analysis, Cartagena, Colombia, April.

Paranjape, P.V., V. Kanhare, N. Sathe, S. Kulkarni and S. Gothoskar (1981) *Grassroots Self-Reliance in Shramik Sanghatana, Dhulia District, India*. World Employment Programme Research Working Paper No. WEP IO/WP.22, International Labour Office, Geneva.

Rahman, Md. Anisur (1981) *Some Dimensions of People's Participation in the Bhoomi Sena Movement*. Participation Occasional Paper, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Geneva.

Tandon, Rajesh (1980) *Participatory Research in Asia*. New Delhi: Centre for Continuing Education.

Tilakaratna, S. (1981) *Grass-Roots Self-Reliance in Two Rural Locations in Sri Lanka: Organisations of Betel and Coir Yarn Producers*. World Employment Programme Research Working Paper No. WEP IO/WP.24, International Labour Office, Geneva.